No. 218

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

*October 4th*, 1944

DEAR MEMBER,

There are two reasons for devoting a considerable part of a News-Letter to a book that has appeared recently—*The Annihilation of Man* by Leslie Paul.[1]

"I TAKE MY STAND"

First, the writer is a serving soldier, who has carried out the task under the difficult conditions of army life for the excellent and weighty reason that the results cannot be happy if, in war time, "our *public* thinking is done by the elderly and non-belligerent and is in consequence too often unrepresentative." "I have been under tremendous compulsion," he says, "during my whole military service, *to think out afresh my view of society and my duty to it.*" Being convinced that "*beliefs* are supreme" he has set himself the task of "finding out what we believe in order that we may discover what we want."

The value to others of such an attempt depends on the range of the factors taken into the reckoning and the thoroughness with which they are faced. The writer lays his account with the chief forces that have made the world what it is to-day—the causes of the war, the significance of capitalism, Marxism and fascism and the position of science and Christianity in the modern world. On all these subjects he writes with knowledge, and his treatment of them is fresh and vigorous. The outstanding characteristic of the book, however, is the sincerity of the search for firm ground on which to stand by one who is resolved to face the realities of the world in which we live and to make up his mind what he believes, in order that he may know how to act.

Secondly, it is of some significance that the writer has by his own route arrived at an understanding of the contemporary situation closely akin to that of the Christian News-Letter. I can find no trace of a direct debt to any of the thinkers who have had most influence in shaping the outlook of the latter, but at crucial points the conclusions are the same.

When the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote in his Supplement a few months ago (C.N-L. No. 198) that "among Christians who have seriously and thoughtfully faced the historical situation there is an observable convergence" in regard to certain matters of central importance, he did not, of course, mean that there is universal agreement. Many Christians have never thought about these questions at all, and even among those who have studied them there are certainly differences in the way of putting things, and perhaps also substantial disagreements. What the Archbishop had in mind was something quite different and much more important. It was that in the most diverse quarters there is emerging with growing clearness a deep and substantial agreement

[1] Faber & Faber, 8s. 6d.

about issues of vital importance. If that is true, it is a fact of the highest significance. It means that in the confusion of our modern perplexities a body of people are beginning to find a common orientation and to see the direction in which we have to move. Of that growing convergence I find fresh evidence in the book of Leslie Paul.

Take, first, the meaning of the war. This war, in which he and millions of his generation are staking their lives, is not for him, like earlier wars, a war *within* Europe, fought within the framework of a common outlook. It is a war *against* Europe. What the Nazis have openly repudiated are the conceptions of freedom, equality, compassion, mercy and brotherhood, which have inspired what is best in Western civilization and derive in the main from Christianity. On the other hand, the writer is equally convinced that these forces of revolt which have reached their culmination in Nazism have roots far more widespread than in Germany alone. The corroding influences which are weakening the hold of the Christian tradition, and consequently destroying the values inseparably bound up with it, are at work everywhere. If that is true, the defeat of Nazism is only the first round in a long-drawn spiritual conflict for the survival of man. The question that must determine all that we do in the next half century is the question why men are allowing to slip from them the things on which their very life as men depends. That is the view of the meaning of the war which the Christian News-Letter has from its beginning tried to expound.

Again, the diagnosis of the fundamental cause of the sickness of Western society is also fundamentally the same. It is that man's whole nature has been thrown disastrously out of balance through the predominance of his passion to subdue to his own purposes an external world by means of science and technology. He has ceased to live in correspondence with his true, total environment because he has concentrated his attention too exclusively on one part of it, and that not the most important part.

To economize space I will put the matter in my own way instead of trying to summarize and comment on Leslie Paul's argument; but, if I understand him rightly, he is driving at the same thing.

The ultimate source of the disorder in Western society, extending from it to the world as a whole, is that men have had in their minds a false picture of what they really are. Ever since the beginning of the age of discovery in the fifteenth century, spurred on by its excitements, they have thought of themselves as individuals over against an external world which it is their aim to understand, explore, control, appropriate and use. (It cannot be too often repeated that it makes no fundamental difference to this attitude that men should have discovered that they can better achieve their purposes by co-operation with others. The collective " we " is for many purposes only a magnified " I ".)

This picture of what man is, which has become so decisive in regard to our whole way of thinking that many people are no longer aware that it is possible to think in any other way, is, in fact, a fatal distortion of the truth about man. Reality is not primarily an infinite and passive world of things awaiting man's exploration and offering limitless opportunities for the amassing of knowledge, wealth and power. It is much more the arena of the ceaseless encounter of living persons, each with

his unique standpoint, who come into collision with one another and with conflicting points of view. The fundamental problem of human existence is not how to master the material world through science and technology, which has been man's predominant interest in recent centuries, but how persons and groups with divergent and opposed points of view may harmonize their competing purposes and achieve that community of persons in which alone men as social beings can find satisfaction.

Within community there is ample room and need for science and technology. But if you start with the individualistic (or, it may be, collective) search for knowledge and power you will never reach community. Equally the individualistic approach to reality leaves no place for God. God becomes an object of man's understanding; man decides whether God exists or not. The truth is the other way round. Man is man because God addresses him and makes on him an unconditional demand. Take away the fact of unconditional obligation and you are left with nothing but the competition of desires and the reign of force.

Without community and without transcendence man is no longer man. Titles like *The Annihilation of Man*, and C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* [1] are either mere sensation-mongering or they point to an issue which dwarfs all others.

This is the Archimedean point at which we must take our stand if we are to bring about any real change in our society. The fact that many diverse minds are reaching agreement about the fundamental error and shortcoming of the period of history that is drawing to its close encourages the hope that something new is already coming to birth. That is the significance of Leslie Paul's book. Like T. E. Hulme's *Speculations* and Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, both of which were the outcome of the experience of the last war, it renders the supreme service of enabling us to see more clearly the watershed between two epochs—the world that is dying and one that has the potency of new life.

## EDUCATION AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

The following are the chief points in a letter criticizing the recent Supplement on the Fleming Report from one of our members, who thinks that the Supplement is far too complacent and disposes too easily of fundamental and difficult problems.

(1) Under the proposals for the Scheme B schools, 75 per cent of the pupils will be able to "buy their way in"; that is to say, they will be admitted because their parents are able to pay for the education, irrespective of whether they have the ability which would have entitled them to a "bursary." These schools are not, therefore, contributing (as is claimed in the Supplement) "to the realization of the principle of education for all according to capacity." The way to give effect to that principle is by open competition for admission, to be taken by all pupils, with a means test. What is proposed may be the best practicable compromise that can be achieved at the present time; the fact that the Report was unanimous suggests that this is so. But the arrangement falls far short of the principle laid down and this ought to have been made clear.

[1] Noticed in C.N-L., No. 206. Oxford University Press, 2s. 6d.

(2) If 75 per cent of the population at a public school are there by virtue of wealth, the tone of these schools is bound to be set by the 75 per cent. If the Supplement is right in emphasizing the powerful and compelling influence of the character and ethos of a public school, its effect can hardly be other than to lift the great majority of the bursars out of their working-class environment and background. What is proposed will thus not lessen social stratification, but merely remove a minority from one stratum to another. The skimming off of people possessing a certain type of ability from the working classes may have serious consequences. Carried to its extreme, it must deprive the working classes of certain types of ability, and this has real social dangers. The problem arises, of course, in any form of graduated educational system, but it becomes peculiarly dangerous when the recruitment of ability is combined with an educational provision that caters in the main for another economic class. For this reason it cannot be assumed, as is done in the Supplement, that the proposal is a step in the right direction ; it may be a dangerous move in the wrong direction.

(3) One of the gravest objections to the continuance of a double educational system is the practical result it may have on the administration of education. Those who politically or professionally direct the national education system have the opportunity by the payment of suitable fees of removing their own children from the facilities provided under that system. If this opportunity of evasion were not available, they would be much more alive to the weaknesses of the national educational system and more active in removing them. The contribution which the tradition of the public schools can make to education may be bought at too high a price if it leads to a neglect of the general educational system by those who have to direct it.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

We have had a number of requests from readers of the News-Letter that we should continue to give attention to the question of the family. One or two letters have said in effect : " The Church has lost the power to mould society as a whole, but it still retains influence in people's personal lives : let us, therefore, concentrate our efforts here and use the resources of the Church to rebuild family life."

The writer of this week's Supplement, who is the wife of Daniel Jenkins, a previous contributor to the News-Letter, enters the discussion at just this point. No human institutions, she says, can be exalted as absolutes or relied on to remain unchanged in a changing world, and she asks us to consider not only whether the family is essential to a healthy society (on which we are perhaps almost too heartily agreed), but what sort of family life can make the best of the social pattern of our age, making an impact upon it and using its best influences for the enrichment of life within the family itself. What Mrs. Jenkins has to say is, with some modifications, the text of an address to teachers, which is in itself an encouraging example of the process of exchange and mutual help which is going on in many places between younger parents and teachers.

Yours sincerely,

D. K. Deacon

# THE FAMILY IN SOCIETY

By NELL JENKINS

Christians in the last few decades, faced with a widespread decline in family life, have been apt to advocate the family part of the Divine Order of Creation without regard to the fact that like all human institutions it is relative. Its form will vary since it is affected by the society in which it is placed, and, more seriously, it may be corrupted by sin. It therefore calls for a fresh moral judgment to be made by each generation. But in our thinking about families and the effect upon them of such innovations as Nursery Schools and the employment of married women, we too often have in mind the family type of the last generation. Our task is not to recapture that or any other mode of family life, but to discover what is the right pattern for our age. This, in spite of their limitations, the great Victorians did. Mrs. Sherwood's *The Fairchild Family*, and Maria Edgeworth's *Ministering Children* and *Moral Tales* were patterns for middle-class homes in the nineteenth century.

It is not surprising that, faced with the widespread disruption of society, the State should awake to the values of the family. To-day it advocates the family as an aid to the return to normality and stability, as a guarantee of a good start for its children. It is very doubtful whether the family alone can be expected to perform all these functions successfully, for it is itself intimately bound up with society and largely reflects those values which society strives to maintain. Nor has there been any wholehearted attempt to discover and control those influences—cultural, economic and social—which have struck at the roots of family life. We Christians who were the first to support the family when it fell on evil days should also be the first to draw attention to the dangers which beset even the most necessary institution in a fallen world. If the family is to perform its proper function and aid the return to normality there is laid upon the Christian a double duty. We must realize our dependence upon the grace of God for the restoration and preservation of normal family life, and we must try to understand in faith what form it should take and how God would have us use it. We must understand the principal function of the family. Itself a community, it is used to train us in community life. We must consider the dangers and opportunities of the changing and changed circumstances which surround and threaten the family, and we must decide what in the society to come should be the specific contribution of the family, as distinct from the school and other organizations, in the education of the child.

The British Council of Churches' Report, *Home and Family Life*, speaking of the part played by the home in the education of the child, describes it as the first cell of truly social living—political, cultural and religious. This is a good description, but it fails to emphasize strongly enough its principal function to give us our first training in community life. Dr. Brunner speaks of the community of the family as "the ordering of the Divine Goodness in Creation, by means of which He

gives us life, through which He gives us to each other, requires us to live for each other and thus educates us for a life in common." This is the fundamental thing, that whatever the child learns he is learning it and living it in a community. It is hardly too much to say that it was primarily in order to learn this lesson first, not by precept but by example, that God ordained that His children should grow up in families. Nor is this only true of the child, for this new community is closely linked with that which is at the heart of the Christian faith, "*communion.*" Christianity asserts the communion of persons within the Godhead. One of the two great sacraments is that of "Holy Communion"; we look hopefully to our place in the "Communion of the Saints." Throughout our life we need to learn this lesson, and even in late life, when we are members of other communities and depend on the family for rest and relaxation rather than training, we continue to learn it—perhaps unconsciously, certainly more intimately—from our homes. We learn it from other communities; but as we learned it first so also we learn it best from the home, living together in a setting of love and authority.

## THREATS TO THE HOME

We may not know exactly what pattern the family is to take, but it is possible to assess the importance and dangers of the forces which threaten it by considering how far they affect its ability to perform this its principal function. A great deal has been said about the effect that the education and economic independence of women and their consequent employment and absence from home will have. It is true that superficially this will greatly affect the pattern of home life, but it does not necessarily endanger the community life of the home. There was always the danger in the homes of the less well-to-do Victorians that the unselfish, even self-sacrificing, life of the mother bred selfishness, whether conscious or unconscious, in her family. It is more than possible that the occupation of the wife and mother in other things than the family may make possible a more co-operative home life and a less introverted one, the family itself opening out more into the life of the community. The danger at present is the opposite one. We are in a time of transition, and with the absence of nurses and domestic servants, the insufficient number of Nursery Schools, and the absence of labour-saving devices, women with families are finding it increasingly difficult to undertake any outside work at all, and are in fact more tied than at any other time. Unless this is remedied, not only will the status of the housewife fall into greater and greater disrepute, but also one of the most fruitful sources (qualitative as well as quantitative) for that voluntary public service which will be so necessary if any kind of socialist state is to come in Britain will be dried up.

But the real threats to the form and stability of the family lie elsewhere. In the last twenty years the State has gradually become more and more anxious about the health, education and now even the coming into existence of its children. There is no question as to the desirability of this interest, if only to counterbalance the flight from the family which has taken place. The danger is that the State looks at it only from its own point of view. Its interest still seems primarily in

the children, the citizens of the future. But the family does not exist simply, or even primarily, for its children. It is good that the old authoritarian attitude towards the child has been superseded, and that the child is now accorded the respect due to one who is a person and not merely an immature adult; but there is a danger of a swing of the pendulum to an exaggerated worship of youth. The family does not exist simply to educate its children, but is a society which exists in its own right. A society in which, as is happening at present, age is continually disparaged in contrast with youth, is in an even more dangerous condition than one in which youth is cramped by age. The one holds the seeds of its own remedy, the other does not.

This century has been one of phenomenally rapid change: there is a great gap in knowledge and outlook between the generations. Further, new theories and practices of child-education have grown up among teachers which are unknown to the vast majority of parents. This has been bad both for school and home. The parents have felt their children growing away from them, and have in many cases felt inferior. This is the most general cause of the lack of discipline and authority in many homes—a lack which is more common than selfishness or cruelty, and equally destructive of true family life. At school there is a twofold danger. The clever children try to find at school something which they miss at home. The less clever, living in two completely different atmospheres, are hardly affected by school at all, and a year or two after leaving will be completely assimilated into their home background, and little different from what they would have been without school. This makes it most urgent to consider the relation of the family to the school. It is not simply that there are many individual examples of bad families. These have always existed and will exist. The failure is not of particular families, but of families in general at this particular period of history. As a result, the school, with its superior mental and material equipment, is taking over and exercising some of the functions which in the past have properly belonged to the family. At the same time there has been a decline in the strength of two of the family's closest allies. We no longer have the household composed of many generations, large enough to be a society in itself without being a narrow one, having its own garden and livestock. Many of the things which the child should learn from the conversation of its elders helping about the house—general information, housework, cookery, sewing, gardening, odd jobs—can no longer be learned in small stuffy kitchens in flats, or small houses without sufficient rooms. As a result, schools have to teach domestic science, start school gardens, and even, as a result of the completely unnatural life of many town children, give sex instruction. This state of affairs we must see as a transitional necessity and not accept as a norm.

Similar problems arise from the decay of another ally, the neighbourhood. A real part in the education of the child is played by his participation in a larger local society, and in small associations and groups within it which lead him on to fuller participation in the life of the place. Classes on civics and current affairs, though useful, are not adequate substitutes. The danger lies not merely in the growth of suburbs and

the decline of the village, but in the whole development of town life in England. Before the Industrial Revolution the town was chiefly composed of the households of gentry and wealthy traders. It was only with the growth of industrialism, when large numbers of poor families congregated in towns, that the anonymous family appeared in Christian England. It is very doubtful whether the small family, isolated from its neighbours, finding its amusement in the escape excitement of the cinema or the temporary thrill of the racecourse, can fulfil the demands which the situation makes upon it. Rather it will be content to drift along, its members living together, but not at one with each other, and it will hand over more and more of its functions to other substitute organizations.

## FUTURE HOPE

The tradition of home life is still strong in England, and has even been strengthened by the war. If new and better forms of town life come as a result of reconstruction programmes, there is a possibility that the dangerous tendencies of the past may be counteracted. The new Education Bill, with its provision for wider forms of education in the Young People's College, could train in necessary knowledge the parents of the future, and make it possible that, in spite of the problems of modern life, a greater proportion of our homes will be places where children can be effectively educated. It is seldom regarded as a commentary on our civilization that we choose to segregate the unfortunate as much as possible ; our home life is not strong enough to support old people—they have to be shuffled off into old-age hostels ; orphans are not absorbed into families, but are segregated in orphanages ; the cripples and mentally defective are tucked away out of sight ; and both we and they lose by it. These are artificial communities—necessary as ambulance work, but dangerous if the State takes them over and hardens into an accepted policy what has been a regrettable necessity. We need to plan roughly for the present and soundly for the future—a future which may not be too far distant—when we return if not to the patriarchal at least to the large family household, large enough to have an honoured place for the old and to absorb the unfortunate, and set in a neighbourhood which, even if people do leave for short periods, is really their home. In such a society the child would draw from school and youth club, not substitutes for home, but what they can properly provide, academic and technical education, companionship with children of their own age, and training in wider responsibility in and for a wider community.

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